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BRAD LEMACK ■

HOW TO BUILD A CAREER IN
A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

THE NEXT EDITION



COVID UPDATE

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE NEW
BUSINESS OF ACTING:
THE NEXT EDITION
COVID UPDATE

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The New Business of Acting:

How to Build a Career in a Changing Landscape

The New Business of Acting:

How to Build a Career in a Changing Landscape—

The Next Edition

SUPPLEMENT TO *THE NEW BUSINESS OF ACTING: THE NEXT EDITION*

the
NEW BUSINESS
of ACTING
IN THE
New COVID
Landscape

An Action Plan for Moving
Forward and Thriving **Now**

BRAD LEMACK



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SUPPLEMENT TO *THE NEW BUSINESS OF ACTING: THE NEXT EDITION* COVID UPDATE

I FIRST WROTE ABOUT the impact of COVID-19 on the business of acting in my June 17th, 2020 column in *Back-stage*. As June turned into July and then as July become a template for, perhaps, the rest of the year, I began considering the new, evolving landscape through a different lens. This pandemic is not going to pass quickly—and if you follow news coverage about the perspectives and opinions of medical and research professionals, this new landscape in which we all are living could easily be evolving for a long time.

So how do you get back to business, stay in business and thrive in business regardless of the business you are in? First, you create a sound action plan for the steps you will need to take to get up and running, to get you back on track and to understand the environment in which your work will take you—all while keeping you safe every step of the way.

My decision to write this *COVID Update* to my current book, *The New Business of Acting: How to Build a Career in a Changing Landscape—The Next Edition*, is rooted in my intent to help guide you through the current challenges of getting back to work with a perspective on what you need to know and what you need to do to restart your career journey armed with the tools and the information you need to thrive in the art and craft of the business of acting.

THE WINTER 2020 SHIFT

I can't recall a time of greater shift in the landscape or a more critical call to action for all industry professionals and others than these days we now find ourselves in. Whether artist, actor, writer, director, production assistant, above-the-line, below the line or, as I prefer to call it, a ("Hollywood") hyphenate of whatever combination best describes you, this is a time of

adjustment, adaptation, reinvention and the creation of a new map for navigating through the business of acting during these challenging times. Both the platforms for which you create content and the delivery mechanisms for audiences to access your work have had a significant shift in this new landscape. While we're not yet lining up to head back into movie theatres, arenas or stage venues, we are, instead, seeking out, discovering and rediscovering a myriad of entertainment alternatives elsewhere—and saving a ton of money on tickets, concession stand snacks and parking lot fees in the process. Of course, and unfortunately, there is also a big price being paid by these venues who are stuck in business neutral and, for most, struggling to survive, until the situation changes.

If you have read my newest book, you know that each topic about the industry is addressed in a collection of 20 chapters. In this supplement, I will address the topics from the book that are being impacted and shifting the most now. My notes are COVID-landscape specific. I encourage you to go to (or return to) the book for the full coverage of each of these important subjects as they relate globally to the business of acting.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT NOW?

Television, particularly network and other broadcast outlets, had been seeing the worse decline in years in audience numbers leading up to the pandemic. Other content providers, like Netflix, Apple TV, Amazon Prime, Hulu and others, were luring away those viewers who had been consumers of broadcast content by offering up more cutting edge, often more “theatrical,” more diverse, on-demand programming. And best of all, of course, your paid subscription to one of these online services ensures no commercial interruptions.

But with the pandemic came lots more time at home for all of us. And for most of us, that meant searching for ways to stay busy, keep current, be safe and find some distraction from the news of what was happening in both the world and down the street. It's too early to announce a resurrection of broadcast television (for entertainment, rather than for just news, sports and special events). But people are talking . . . and a lot of that talk is about “Did you see such and such on TV last night?”

As you are witnessing, with the pandemic also came tremendous job losses, which are still happening. As a result, many people began looking for ways to cut their monthly expenses and, for many, a massive move not so long ago to cut the cable has given way to a move to cut out online subscription services in an attempt to make monthly financial ends meet. All of a sudden, having to endure a few minutes of commercial breaks doesn't seem so much of an inconvenience in favor of free.

None of us can say for sure when we will be on the other side of this pandemic. But it is fairly safe to assume that the re-engagement of broadcast television by millions of viewers will/has put pressure on content creators to figure out how to keep those viewers—and the answers to that challenge lie in the creation of a lot of new, creative, strategic and diverse programming.

What does this have to do with “Back to Work in the COVID Business of Acting Landscape?” Just about everything. The demand for new content that will appeal to and keep any audience engaged on any platform will result in the creation of more opportunities (read: jobs) than perhaps at any other time in the history of the industry. There is an audience thirst for this content and to quench that thirst, there will be/is a tremendous need for writers to write, producers to producer, production assistants to assist, directors to direct—and, of course, for actors to create these new roles that will be a critical component in this new age of storytelling.

THE SHIFT AND THE CHALLENGE FOR LIVE PERFORMANCE VENUES

In the business of acting, live performance venues have, arguably, taken the biggest financial hit from COVID and its ongoing fall out. From Broadway to every regional, local and community theatre across the country and the planet, closed venues mean closed opportunity, empty seats and serious financial challenges. For many, these are insurmountable losses directly impacting venue operators, performers, production personnel and every other artist and contributor to the process of creating and presenting live, staged performing arts.

The business for large movie theatre chains and independent exhibitors alike has all but come to a screeching halt, as well, of course, in this landscape—and while studios have proven that they can turn to or create other platforms on which to distribute and present their content, the fall out, in terms of jobs lost in those local movie houses and cinemas has been devastating in that sector, too.

Venue owners, whether the big chains or local operators, are faced with the challenges of finding creative, strategic ways to keep their businesses afloat, while either closed or in a severely reduced operating mode, depending on often rapidly changing local regulations.

In the meantime, we are seeing some very clever and entrepreneurial venue owners and operators serving up alternate live entertainment options in empty parking lots and drive in theaters where you can enjoy a night out from the safety of your vehicle.

However, whenever the new normal for public entertainment venues arrives—and that could still be a while—the industry will be faced with three

very important questions: 1) How can we keep our venues safe (under whatever the rules in the “new normal” will be), 2) How can we (re)gain the trust of ticket buyers and 3) What can we do to help dissipate whatever fear factor might (still) remain about spending time in a large room with lots of other people, masked or not.

Movie theaters will not be alone in this challenge. Concert venues, arenas, big theatres, small theatres, playhouses, even producers at outdoor performance spaces will face the big question: Can we get them back?



Deals to shift delivery and availability of films and other content initially meant for the large screen of a movie theater to the smaller screens of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV or other platform is a relatively easy process, compared with the challenges of how to breathe new life into stage plays and musicals that are intended for live performance.

Thankfully, reimagining some productions for virtual platforms has made it possible for many both non-profit and for-profit organizations to offer up live performance entertainment options for audiences wherever they are, broadening the scope of their audience base in the process. That’s a piece of very good news in these challenging times.

While nothing can compare with the energy and the magic of being in the same place, in the same space, as the performers and the performance itself, there has been some incredible work adapted from what would have been a live stage performance to a YouTube-delivered live performance platform. The added value with many of these adaptations is that the majority of them are also serving as fundraisers for important organizations, such as Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and The Actors Fund, and others, who are providing critical financial assistance and other resources to actors who have been impacted by the pandemic.

To date, three of the most engaging virtual performances I have seen were each delivered with stunning success, live via YouTube.

Michael Urie’s recreation of his award-winning, one-person performance of “Buyer & Cellar,” live from his New York City apartment, was nothing short of brilliant. And multi-award winners Sally Field and Brian Cranston’s performance reading of A.R. Gurney’s “Love Letters,” from each of their home bases, was as outstanding as any live-in-the-theatre performance I have ever seen of that play, including touring and regional productions several of my clients have appeared in.

Brava and bravo to Michael, Sally and Brian—and all of those involved—for the gifts of these free-to-watch performances that generated both impressive audience numbers in viewership and significant financial contributions in support of the work of the sponsoring organizations.

Should you need assistance or wish to contribute to the cause, you will find a list of some of the organizations at the top of our short-list at the end of this supplement.

DIFFERENCES AT WORK ON A SET

It is time to learn how to be efficient, how to stay productive, how to keep positive, how to navigate your journey anew and how to thrive in this new landscape. And for many, if not most, until we get the “all clear,” that means working from home with a slow, but perhaps steady, ramp up expected. It will take time; we are starting to see blips of activity now that are very encouraging. But self-taping and live connections from home are absolutely here to stay. More about that later. During this time, much new content has been created and released from home offices and home studios. But it is also time to prep for getting back to work on a set again and to be aware of what that will look like.

State laws and new COVID-specific rules and regulations will always dictate legal protocol on a set. Here are some of my notes specifically for actors:

- ◆ Don't count on being fed or given beverages in the same way it was done pre-COVID. While SAG-AFTRA agreement-required meals will still be provided, you will now see safe, secure and individually-packaged delivery of these food and drink items, in place of the overstocked and alluring crafts services tables of days not-so-long ago. But that's on union-sanctioned projects. For non-union projects, it's anyone's guess. But better to go into a non-union work environment prepared with everything you will need for your day on the set. Bring your own beverages. Bring snacks. Bring a meal. Bring with you whatever you think you will need, expect you will need or might want to have on hand. Actually, that's a good idea for union actors, as well.
- ◆ Expect temperature checks via forehead scan when you check in and at random times throughout the day.
- ◆ Bring a mask, wear a mask and take along a spare, just in case.
- ◆ For union productions, prepare to abide by the new production zones plan, which dictates a safety protocol based on several production-

related factors. You should read and become familiar with the specifics of this “Safe Way Forward” plan and the descriptions of the zone system designations. It is accessible on the SAG-AFTRA website

(https://www.sagaftra.org/files/sa_documents/ProductionSafetyGuidelines_June2020EditedP.pdf).

- ◆ Bring your own travel-size container of hand sanitizer and/ or disinfecting wipes and use them often throughout the day.
- ◆ Expect to still have the normal paperwork to review and sign, so bring your own pen. Actually, bring two, just in case.
- ◆ All of the social distancing rules that we have become familiar with will be enforced both on and off the set. When you’re not needed on set, you will be required to maintain social distancing rules, as well. Don’t expect to be able to hang with your fellow actors in the same way you might have before. This might mean lots of down time on your own, so bring some work to keep you busy or books to read (like *The New Business of Acting: The Next Edition*!).

One thing we can expect, for sure, is that these rules will continue to change as conditions change. As production ramps up around the globe, expect to see other states and countries adopt strategic plans to get their economies moving again by trying to attract film and television studio and location back work to their territories. As I write this, the United Kingdom, for example, has eased the required quarantine rules for visitors to that country if the reason for the visit is work in a film or television project. Important note: You will have to be able to prove that you have already been hired in order to avoid the required 14-day quarantine period imposed on tourists.

HEAD SHOTS

Chapter 6 (“The Art of the Head Shot . . .”) addresses in great depth everything you need to know about how to ensure a great head shot session. Many photographers are now providing their services with a social distancing protocol. New to the mix of services now are “drive-by shootings,” but absolutely and of course *not* the news-coverage kind. In these instances, you arrange a safe, outdoor location to meet for your shoot. You both arrive separately, keep your safe distances and tend to the business at hand.

A side note: Rarely have I seen a photo session where the photographer

was much closer than around six feet to the person they were shooting, indoors or outside. But now that we need to think about all of those details, some different light needs to be shed. If an in-the-studio session can be scheduled to your comfort level, then, if at all possible, shoot indoors. You should expect your photographer to be masked at all times—and for you to be masked in between the set-ups of your shots. In fact, even at an outdoor shoot, you should expect or request that your photographer wear a mask.

Nothing about the new COVID landscape changes anything about how you should go about researching and selecting a photographer. However, there are a few new questions to ask when you connect with this person before your session. Will my session take place in a closed-room studio? Outside? Can you ensure a distance of at least six feet between us will be maintained at all times?

I am not a fan of head shots taken outside. I write extensively about why that is in Chapter 6. It's hard to control or manipulate light; glare from the sun can be a problem and shadows cast from your surrounding can be impossible to work around without compromise—and, too often, unfortunately, that compromise is evident in the end results. Inside a photographer's studio, environmental conditions can be controlled, including room temperature, making the session a comfortable experience for all involved. But, on top of everything, it must a safe space in every way throughout the shoot.

There is a “however” with regard to my “photos taken outside” preference that is the result of these unique times. We are all learning how to be adaptable these days and given that the best place to have your new head shots taken might very well be at an outside location, I am willing to bend the rules a bit in the name of safety first, safety always. But the high bar on quality never varies.

It is vital that you connect with your selected photographer prior to your session. I always prefer that this happens in-person. But, in these unusual times, a meeting via Zoom, Facetime or other online meeting platform is certainly acceptable. Don't overlook this piece of the journey of your photo session. You want to have seen and connected with your photographer before you meet him or her in person for your session. You should each come away from this introductory meeting with a sense of each other's personality, knowing each other's expectations for the session and an understanding of how the session will evolve.

A “fiscal fitness” side note: I wrote about this in one of my recent columns for *Backstage*. In lieu of seeking a new head shot session now, it might be (and frequently is) worth taking a look at the proofs from a previous, recent session first. Perhaps there are shots among those many images that still work in support of your brand? If that is the case, you can use those now to refresh your submission materials without having to cover the expense or manage the

potential exposure risk of a new session.

A final piece of advice on this topic: In this new landscape, should you decide to move forward with a new session, indoors or out, you should arrive for your session camera-ready, wardrobe in hand and ready to get down to business—and, of course, always be on time.

Chapter 6 in the book offers up an important check list of everything else you need to know—or to rethink when seeking a head shot session. I urge you to check that out.

MANAGERS & AGENTS

Chapter 7 in *The Next Edition* (“The Business of Talent Representation”) goes into great detail about the work those of us who represent you do from both a day-to-day and global perspective—and nothing about that has changed in the COVID landscape except *how* we do what we do.

In-person meetings are out, for now, at most agent’s and manager’s offices, in favor of Zoom, Facetime or other meeting platform visits—and, in my office, also lots of chats and meetings by phone.

How many of us approach signing new clients has also been a bit reframed. Most companies have their submission policies published on their websites, with clear and concise instructions on the process, if you are an actor seeking to be represented. We all get a lot of inquiries from actors this way.

When we review those submissions, if, at first glance, the actor presents a brand and/or type that fits with what our agency is looking for, a dive into that person’s career evidence is our first order of business. If, after that review, interest remains, you will be contacted about providing additional support material, additional evidence of your career potential. Before COVID, if interest was still developing, we would set up an in-person meeting for an initial meet-and-greet-and-chat. Now, you can expect that first meeting to be in a virtual space.

The more significant change for most us is a great secret that I am about to reveal . . .

Those of us who rep you do so based on lots of factors that are vetted during the get-to-know-you stage. But we also rep you based on gut instinct.

Besides the evidence that you provided to us that we can, in turn, provide to a casting director in our pitch of you in support of securing an audition, we passionately go to bat for you without ever really knowing *how* you audition. For sure, we’re confident that you can deliver when hired. But getting to that point is a great leap of faith on our part, hoping that you are as great an auditioner as you will be as a hired, paid, waiting-for-your-close-up actor. But

the truth is, we never really knew. Until now.

The COVID landscape has all but done away with first-look in- the-room auditions; just about everything has move to self-tape—and now, add to that, virtual auditions that will get you as close to being in the room with a live, “in-person” casting director as we’re able to get now.

Virtual auditions create a great opportunity for you to be able to book the room in a way that simply doesn’t exist in a self-tape. Chapter 8, on “The Business of Talent Casting,” dives deeply into why booking the room is more important than booking the role. But Chapter 10 (“Self-Tape Auditions: Never-Before-Seen Opportunity vs. Incredible Risk”) takes an important look at the self-tape process and why so many actors fail at this process, developing some sloppy audition habits along the way. I have more to say about this later in this supplement.

But here is a big, new “positive” about the new self-tape landscape that I am very excited about. For the first time, we who represent you now get to see *how* you audition.

If you are represented, that self-tape request from the casting director comes to us first. Then it goes to you. Upon completion, you send your self-tape audition to us. Here is part of the great reveal: We actually view and review what you have sent before it is sent off to the casting director. I love this. And if you are not sure if your agent or manager does this, request that they do. The feedback can make the difference between call back or delete.

It gives us an opportunity to assess your presentation, the packaging and the technical aspects of your submitted audition—and, while we usually leave character creation up to you, this also gives us an opportunity to talk with you about those choices before we send your audition off to the casting director. We also have the ability to ensure that your self-tape checks off all of the boxes technically that are essential for serious consideration of your audition: lighting, sound, background, shot set-up.

I call this enhanced product development. *You* are the product. We both have a vested interest in everything about how our product is perceived and experienced by the end user . . . in this case, the casting director . . . and, of course, in this case, it’s all about you.

In the COVID business of acting landscape, depending on the scheduling needs of the casting director, expect that your agent and/or manager will want you to turn around a self-tape audition request a bit quicker than before. This will allow both of us the time to perform due diligence in the process of getting your work ready to be seen in the best possible light so that we can ensure that you book the room, if not also the job. It’s a potential big win.

For those of you who are not yet represented, the onus of *both* subjective and

objective evaluation of your self-tape audition falls on you. View your audition the way an agent, manager or casting director might. Are you showcasing the best “you” in your self-tape? Is there anything in your presentation that could serve to distract a viewer’s attention away from your performance? Are you well lit? Can you be heard clearly? Is there anything else in the shot that would take a viewer’s eyes away from a focus on your performance?

Represented or not, you can ace this—and in the time of COVID, it is imperative that you do.

MONEY MATTERS

Chapter 13 (“Emotional, Physical & Fiscal Fitness”) offers up a lot of pages on three of the most important topics in the business of acting: protecting yourself, building confidence and staying fit for work—and keeping the bills paid while you pursue acting opportunities—and nothing about the COVID landscape changes that. In fact, the COVID landscape both enhances and magnifies it.

The pandemic has placed historic numbers of people out of work. Perhaps you are one of the many, many actors who have found themselves out of work or having been given reduced hours at your “other” support job. If you fall into that category, you have my utmost empathy with my hope that those circumstances change for you soon.

Here is the good news: In the business of acting, there will absolutely be massive opportunity ahead for artists and hyphenates of all kinds. The unplanned production hiatus has left all providers of content with an incredible need for new product for the pipeline. This huge need will certainly create work. But the challenge in this landscape, which isn’t, unfortunately, much different than the previous landscape, is that while there will be lots of opportunity to work, the budgets to both produce new content and pay artists, actors and others involved in that process for their work will not reflect the urgency of the need. At least not right away.

There are reasons for everything and, in this case, in the business of acting, the explanation is not just the result of the COVID impact.

Several years ago, SAG-AFTRA forever changed the playing field by introducing the Ultra Low Budget contract which allows producers, who meet the requirements of that designation, the ability to hire union actors for just \$125 a day. Chapter 11, on “Unions and Actors,” offers up a very meaty section on the “hows” and “whys” behind this—and a lot more. In the past five years, there has been a proliferation of content produced under this ULB contract.

There is nothing new about that. What is new is that many producers have

both endured and had to manage through the same financial challenges the rest of us have struggled with during and because of COVID—and their production budgets will reflect those challenges. Nonetheless, as during the pre-COVID landscape, look for and accept work opportunities that help propel your career journey forward. Never look at an acting job for the money it might bring to you. Instead, look for the experience and exposure you might gain from the opportunity. Look for the added value—and very rarely is added value defined in terms of dollars and cents.

In my business, we look for potential, not perfection. An opportunity for us to see that potential in the career evidence you present to us can make the difference between getting signed now, later or not at all—and in your ability to get into “the room” for a shot at booking both the room and landing the role. Accept acting work that fuels you, that serves your journey and that always keeps you safe. That was true before COVID. It is even truer now.

One last note about SAG-AFTRA: The guild’s leadership joined with the leadership of other creative unions and guilds in crafting a plan and protocol for going back to work in the COVID landscape. You can and should read that document, titled “The Safe Way Forward,” on the SAG-AFTRA website (at <https://www.sagaftra.org/news-events/news/covid-19>)—and I urge you to do so.

Regarding those of you who are not yet union members, in terms of the rates of pay, it will be pretty much open season—and with the proliferation of non-union work that we have seen over the last few years, the expectation is that part of the new landscape will be similar to what it was pre-COVID. Perhaps even more so. We are prepared to continue to expect the attitude from producers that if you won’t do the job for the amount offered, someone else will.

We have actually experienced a lot of this in regard to scale union payments offered to some clients for work in SAG-AFTRA sanctioned projects, as well. I have, many times, been told when given an offer for a client, that if my client will not work for the rate offered, the casting director will go to the next name on the director’s choice list. It happens more often than you might think. Once again, it becomes an “added value” assessment. Will we gain more than we have to give up by accepting this job?

Performance in the business of acting has, historically, been lucrative for relatively few. So why do so many people pursue this profession? Because they *have* to. A career in the business of acting must, as award-winning actor Hal Linden told me in an interview for our “Inside the Business of Acting” YouTube series, be about *the journey*.

It’s about creating. It’s about storytelling. It’s about art—and, historically,

great art has always come out of challenging times. Great art, great music, great literature, great stories that need to be told. You can and will have your opportunity to create and share your own art—and we are all eager to both witness and experience your contributions.

Most artists maintain dual or more careers in support of their art. That was true before COVID and nothing about having to manage that challenge has changed. The goal is always to reach a point along your journey when your art gives back to you—and your ability to strive to make that happen needs to remain strong. Embrace your passion and focus always on how to keep moving forward. You can. You will.



Actors are not alone in their desire for financial balance. In this evolving landscape, this also needs to be a conversation that includes how money matters and fiscal fitness challenges are impacting talent agencies and talent management firms, as well. These challenges are equally significant—and for many of us who represent actors and others, these challenges have presented a time for hard choices to be made.

I have heard from many actors who have e-mailed me in a state of near-panic after learning that their agent or manager is closing his or her business. The truth is that even working from a home office these days has presented many a talent rep with the challenge of how to continue to connect the financial dots in an industry where, pandemic or not, the costs of staying in business balanced against declining commissions (referencing back to the SAG-AFTRA Ultra Low Budget contract and the proliferation of non-union productions which has typically paid actors less for their work), make it impossible for even the most diversified and prolific agent or manager to keep the doors open. It's a hard choice. It's a tough choice. But, unfortunately, for many, the COVID impact on the business of acting has delivered only one choice: Close up shop.

If you have been represented and find yourself in this situation, 1) Do not panic, 2) Do not fear that you will not find new representation (you will) and 3) Start thinking strategically about how this new challenge fits into your COVID landscape action plan.

Let's add to this conversation those of you who have been represented and come to the decision, during the COVID hiatus, that it is time to seek new representation elsewhere. You, too, should start adding to your action plan the strategic moves you will need to take to make this happen. Now, of course, is not the time to actually do your outreach to a potential new agent or manager. But now is very definitely the time to carve out the plan for implementing this shift when things settle. Your plan absolutely must contain the steps for the

creation or the refreshing of the evidence you will submit in support of your search—and this could not be a better time for you to start tending to that creative task. More about that later.

If you are not represented, whether an agency or management company closes doesn't impact you directly at the moment. But I have never met an unrepresented actor who didn't wish for someone established in the industry to head their team.

As we arrive at whatever the new normal will be for those of us who represent talent, we will be tasked with performing a hard assessment of the value, the quality, the potential of every name on our roster. There will be clients it will be time for us to part with. There will be clients for us to increase our level of expectations of (while managing the reality of those new expectations) and there will be new clients we will seek to sign, who will bring with them fresh energy, striking passion, impressive potential—and fit the need for the diversity that has been lacking in many a talent representative's client list.

As a result, while some agencies will be gone, others may open. But many others will be reinvented to fit the demands of the new landscape—and this is a positive for all actors and artists, both those we currently represent and those whom we have yet to meet.

THE MAKING OF A COVID LANDSCAPE ACTION PLAN: WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING NOW

1) Getting ready. 2) Staying ready. 3) Keeping positive. 4) Building an action plan that is COVID-proof. Now let's dive into how to accomplish that.

An action plan is critical at any stage of a working actor's—or want-to-be-a-working-actor's career. I write extensively about this in a chapter devoted to this topic in my current book (Chapter 15 —“It's All About the Plan: Create and Launch Your Action Plan for Career Success”). Nothing about the pandemic changes the need for you to have a plan; it's just that your plan now needs to reflect the changes, challenges and requirements that getting back on your career journey will require of you.

REP TALK: GET BACK TO “BUSINESS,” BUT DON'T FORGET THE “PERSONAL”

If you are represented, be proactive now about having a phone conversation or online meeting with your agent and/or manager. If you have both, get all three of you together for a Zoom platform conversation about how to start planning today for everything that will come next. What can you do to help the person

or people who represent you do the job to the best of their ability in this new landscape?

Talk about your action plans steps that you are or will soon be implementing to help move your brand—and your brand awareness forward on your career journey.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, make it a point to ask your agent and/or manager how they and their families are doing these days. We have not been immune to the same pandemic-related stress that you have been experiencing. These are relationships beyond just business; show you care about them as people, not just as conduits.

SPRING CLEANING

You should be cleaning house now, both literally and figuratively, regardless of the season. It is time to take hard look at the career support materials you use and the evidence you have to present in support of your career potential. Whether you are represented or not, it is the freshness of your career evidence that helps open doors to opportunity for you.

Start by taking a hard, objective look at your profiles on whatever professional, industry-used services you use for self-submissions. If you are represented, it is critical to understand the connection between those profiles pages and what that content means to your agent or manager. Everything you upload to and create for your profile pages (on Actors Access, Casting Frontier, Casting Networks and any other related service that your agent or manager might use) are the materials we access to select which photo and which video clip we use in our submission of you for each role you are audition-right for.

How many photos are in your account? How old are those photos? How effective have those photos been? Do those photos serve both your brand and your type well? Has your appearance changed in any way from the image you present in the photos you have been using?

If your assessment indicates that a refreshing of the page is needed, now is the time to tackle that project. As you read earlier in this supplement about head shots, this does not necessarily mean a new head shot session. In fact, in these times of COVID, opportunities to spend less are very embraceable. And for those of you who are managing through a loss of income due to the pandemic, you certainly cannot afford spend what you do not have—and I never encourage anyone to create credit card debt for these expenses. There is almost always another way to approach this—and for head shots, as you read earlier and as I want to underscore, first return to what you already have before trying to fund a new session.

The truth is that you only use a few of the images taken from any photo session. What a waste! What we have been doing in my office—and what I have been doing with my clients—is taking another look at the images from his or her last session that we did not choose to use. Key to this image dive is how you look now compared with how you looked then. We're all entitled to age, to change, to transform our look in any way we want. But if how you look now doesn't match the image used in your submissions, the new selections will quickly work against you and should not be used.

It is important to remember that an invitation from a casting director for you to audition is a gift to you based on several key factors: How you present, what you look like, his or her perception of your potential to ace the role, his or her perception of whether or not you are the right actor (not the best actor!) for the role and, of course, an assessment and evaluation of your evidence submitted, specifically your resume and video clip(s).

I would never want you to get an audition invitation that you accept that later triggers a negative response because how you look in your self-tape isn't how your look in your submitted head shot. We who represent you would never let that happen. But if you are repping yourself, be smart about the choices you make. Let those choices work for you . . . and absolutely own who you are and how the world sees you. We love seeing that confidence.

That's a long way around to my point: If there are shots that still work from a recent, previous session, use them—and, if not, start planning your strategy for how you can safely acquire or earn the funds you will need for a fresh, new head shot session. My Business of Acting Gift Registry concept, introduced in *The Next Edition* on page 185, could help you bridge the gap between whatever funds you have and the funds you will need to make this happen.

DUST OFF YOUR RESUME

Resumes are, as you have experienced, predominantly virtual and online these days, and while there isn't much (if anything) you can do to alter the default, template format of how the various online casting submission service providers present your resume, there is *everything* you can do to clean it up, make it sparkle, keep it current and showcase the best of you in a listed form.

Is everything on your resume completely accurate and truthful? If you once had a special skill that you no longer have or have become rusty at, brush up on it or remove it. In fact, the COVID slowdown in the industry is a perfect time for you to get reacquainted with your old "special" skills and to acquire some new ones.

If a credit on your resume is too old or no longer suits where things are now on your career journey, delete it, too.

VIDEO EVIDENCE IS NOT FOREVER

Everything has a shelf life. Career evidence that lingers long after its “sell by” date does not serve you. Use this time now to access, assess and, if necessary, remove any clips on your self-submission profiles that are not supportive of your career potential. It is better to have no current video evidence than it is to have outdated evidence. I will let you define what “current” means to you. However, as with head shots, if the “you” we see in your video clips doesn’t look like the “you” we will see in your self-tape, then those clips go, too. One additional note: Career evidence of your potential can absolutely include footage of you playing a character that doesn’t exactly look like you; costumes and makeup always enhance an actor’s creation of and portrayal of a role. But be sure there is enough other evidence available (like your perfect head shot) that will present a current image of the “real” you.

The good news in this evolving landscape is that now casting directors have the opportunity to consider more actors for each role being cast. Self-tape and virtual auditions have leveled that playing field a lot. In the time it used to take a casting director to audition 10 actors, in-person, in the room, he or she can now see 50 on tape. Casting director Paul Ruddy talks about this in detail in our conversation for our “Inside the Business of Acting” COVID Update YouTube series.

There is more about this ahead. But the wake-up call here is that even though casting directors can now audition more actors than before for a single role, you still need the right evidence to gain access to that platform—and that means, at the very least, a great head shot and a well-constructed, smartly-written, fully-accurate resume.

Lastly, one of the great wins of the available technology at our hands is that you do not have to wait for someone to hire you to create great evidence of your potential. The “Hollywood Hyphenate” chapter in *The New Business of Acting: The Next Edition* will guide you through the details of how to move this endeavor forward.

WEBSITES

If you do not already own YourName.com, buy it. You may not be ready for a full-on, all-the-bells-and-whistles website just yet. But having a website for your business of acting brand (that’s you!) is an important marketing tool. This is a great time to explore your options on how to create and build your own site—and there are a lot of very low-cost options available. Your head shot, your resume, your bio . . . these are all the fundamental, foundational elements of any actor’s website. Your COVID landscape action plan needs to include your steps to achieve this brand showcase opportunity.

Next, if you do not already have one, create your own (free) YouTube channel page. As with your website, the goal is to create this platform in your name. It is this platform onto which you should upload your ready-to-be-seen video evidence and link directly to it from your website

IMDb/IMDbPro

This is a great time to assess your IMDb/IMDbPro account profile page and credits listing, if you have one. If you do not yet have one, this is a great time to get familiar with the resources available to you by having an IMDbPro account (IMDb is a free service; you have to subscribe to IMDbPro to create and manage your personal page and to also be able to access contact information for other listed actors, producers, casting directors, etc.). This is a great career investment that is also a potential tax-deductible expense against your business of acting income earned.

If you have worked a professional acting job (or been the producer, director, writer, etc. of a professional film, television or new media project) then check to ensure that the credit you earned is on your profile page. Whether it was a union or non-union project is irrelevant; it's whether you did the job that matters. If you earned a credit that is missing, request that it be added through the service's system. One additional note: If it is an acting job, it has to have been a speaking part. Extra or atmosphere work isn't included as a category you can contribute to or list in—at least not yet.

CLASSES AND TRAINING SHOULD NOT STOP

Your training and readiness for work should never stop, pandemic or no pandemic. Great online classes have emerged during the COVID pandemic. Do not overlook the opportunity to get a group of actor friends together and workout over Zoom with the reading of a play or name a coach among you and experiment with virtual improv.

One of the great discoveries for me during this time was finding out how fun, how beneficial, how good, improv can be online. For the last several years, I co-taught an improv course in Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB) technique, among my several classes offered at the Emerson College Los Angeles Campus. The final project in our class has always been a student performance on one of UCB's stages, in Hollywood. COVID took that opportunity away from us this past spring, as was the case for most other similar projects, showcases, graduations and other rite-of-passage events for students and schools globally.

Need often creates its own opportunity and as we moved our spring semester classes online, we turned to Zoom. With my students back at their home bases all around the world, this was a firsttime experiment for all of us

as we transitioned our classes, training and run-thru performances to a virtual rehearsal hall and stage.

Improv, in particular, is, for me, a listening exercise first . . . and you do not need to be in the same room for that. It took us a few classes to get it right. But, in the end, my students were at the top of their game in our end-of-semester, virtual, live performance. I am very proud of what they achieved through patience, trust, reimagining the goal, and embracing the confidence that they could get it done. And they did.

Try it with your actor friends. It's a fun romp, it's a great way to stay sharp and, these days, when there are varying bits of anxiety running through all of us, it can be a great stress reducer.

THE VIRTUAL, LIVE COVID-ERA AUDITION

Just as we got comfortable with tackling the challenge of how to produce and deliver great self-tape auditions, COVID brought us pretty much the end of in-the-room (for first-round and even call back) auditions. At least for now. But maybe for always.

We were seeing the occasional request for online, live auditions before the pandemic. But not many. It was over three years ago that a critical time crunch necessitated an audition via Facetime for a client of mine. It was a great leap of faith then. But my client booking the role made me a believer in the potential of meeting and auditioning actors this way—one day. But then COVID happened.

I have addressed the self-tape and virtual audition process protocol earlier in this supplement. But it is important to revisit that topic for a moment and focus on virtual audition packaging, presentation and behavior. I love that virtual auditions are getting actors into “the room” in a way self-tapes cannot. But I have seen some lazy virtual behavior that can derail a great actor's shot at a booking.

The same location you have created for your self-tape recording is the same location, if at all possible, from where you should connect for your virtual, live auditions. In this new landscape, it is most likely going to be a self-tape that will be requested of you first. You can almost guarantee that a call back, should you get one, will be live and virtual.

Gary Marsh, owner and president of Breakdown Services (for agents and managers) and Actors Access (the company's self-submit tool for actors that you may already be using) recently launched Eco Cast Live, a new, innovative system offering a platform for virtual, live auditions. Other industry professional services are—or will soon be—offering up similar opportunities

for casting directors, talent representatives and actors (both represented and unrepresented). Gary talks about Eco Cast Live in one of our new YouTube “Inside the Business of Acting” COVID segments.

The pressure to ace this process might be on. So, how do you turn it off? Prepare, focus and embrace the good news that something in your self-tape checked off enough of the right boxes to get you to the next step. As with self-taping, lighting, background and audio quality are critical. Unlike self-tapes, you will not be able to try it over and over again until you get it right. This is like live television. It has to be right from the start. You will notice that I didn’t say that it has to be “perfect,” because perfection won’t get you the job. But showcasing your potential might.

Odds are against every actor in any audition situation that you will book the role. But more important than booking the role—and you have heard this from me before—is booking the room.

How do you do that in a virtual, live space? Be focused, look great, be prepped, be ready, smile! This could be the start of a great relationship that might get you back into this casting director’s (virtual) room easier and more frequently.

Remember that when your video is on, it’s always on. If you yawn, everyone who is watching your call back will see you yawn. If you react in an odd way to something said (even if it wasn’t said to you), we’re all going to see it. Ditto for your audio. Unless you’re on mute, we’re all going to hear not only everything you have to say, but the noise from everything else around you. My best piece of advice for your virtual, live audition or for any virtual, live (business) meeting you have now or later: Simply be present; stay engaged.

THE VIRTUAL SHOWCASE HAS ARRIVED

Another huge shift in the COVID landscape has been the death of the college acting showcase as we have known it. Creating an opportunity for students to be seen and for industry professionals to discover the potential in young talent has been the backbone of many college and university acting programs. Over the years, many schools from around the country have been coming to Los Angeles and New York to present graduating senior acting class showcases. Among them, has been my own Emerson College Los Angeles Campus Business of Acting class. Already being in L.A. has made the endeavor a bit easier in some ways, but just as competitive in other ways.

All of us target agents, managers, casting directors and other industry professionals with invitations to attend one of our showcases. In the spring, in particular, it’s not unusual for there to be collective showcase performances each night over a several week period. It is impossible for all of the people we

target to attend every one of these presentations. So, we call in favors, we pitch, we promote, we all do everything we can to get industry butts in seats. But regardless of the actual turnout, our students were still limited as to the number of people who could see their work and experience their potential. This has always been a frustrating component of these endeavors. But that was pre-COVID.

Welcome the virtual showcase! Much like with self-tape auditions, our student actors do not have the opportunity to meet these industry professionals face-to-face. But in its place, the opportunity, the potential, for each student to be showcased on-demand is a huge trade-off worth accepting.

Platforms are being created on services like Breakdown Express (one of Gary Marsh's Breakdown Services entities) that allow colleges and universities to partner with Marsh's company. The result is a global platform on which videos of all student showcase performances can be uploaded to, promoted and available for viewing by any authorized agent, manager or casting director anywhere on the planet—and, as of this writing, this is no-cost service to the schools.

I love the opportunity this creates. But with opportunity also comes challenge. Over the last few months, I have viewed many of these virtual showcase performances. Much like the challenges with self-tape, students and their teachers need to select material that works best for the delivery platform and ensure that, technically, it has everything going for it to be seriously viewed and not easily dismissed.

Not every student or teacher is a producer, but they all need to become hyphenates in the need, the obligation, the responsibility, to get this right. Adapting what would have been a stage performance to a virtual platform is the same challenge for showcase performers and presenters as it is for professional performers and producers—and that includes such key factors as sound, lighting, background.

As with self-taped auditions, there may be some wonderful potential for us to discover through these virtual showcases. But beware distractions along that journey that could stand in the way.

QUIET ON THE SET COULD NOW MEAN DEALING WITH A BARKING DOG OR A NOISY NEIGHBOR

I wrote earlier in this supplement about the things you should know before heading off to a job on a set in this new landscape. But what if that set is your own home or apartment? If the trend continues, more and more actors will be asked, in this COVID landscape, if they can shoot from their home bases. A client of mine was just hired to do a commercial from his home. In this

landscape, he not only had to be the right actor for the job, he had to be the right actor with the right home space and the right environment to shoot in.

The production company sent over all of the equipment that would be needed and talked him through, virtually, every step of the way. He also got paid \$1,000 above and beyond his pay for appearing in the commercial for the use of his home. Not a bad rate of pay for a day's work.

As projects, both theatrical and commercial, begin to ramp up, start up and reemerge, you can expect to see a lot more of this request. Being the "right" actor for the job has now taken a new, added meaning.

Going to work in the age of COVID means safety first. No job is worth accepting if it puts you at risk. When a booking is offered to you, ask all of the questions you need to ask to ensure that there are no surprises—and absolutely no risks.

No agent or manager will have an adverse reaction to a client who turns down a job due to perceived or actual safety and/or risk factors. In fact, it is our job to protect you at all costs—and if a work situation presents itself that poses any risk as your rep vets the opportunity, your agent and/or manager will be the first person to apply the brakes. If you are not yet or not currently represented, you will need to be both advocate and actor in asking about and being completely clear on what will be expected of you held up against what you are willing to say "yes" to.

It will be a while before there is a ramp up and a return to work for most live performance venues. But when that happens, everything that applies to clearing the way for a safe and protected work environment on a set applies to the live visual and performing arts, as well.

MUST-HAVE SUPPLIES: A REVIEW

Let's revisit the list of must-haves that has been referenced earlier in this supplement. I am not a medical or healthcare professional. But none of us have to be credentialed as such to stay smart about keeping safe.

You should be stocking up on the supplies you will need when you need to be out in the world, and particularly when you are headed to a set (or other workspace) for a job:

- ◆ Masks: Have one to wear and always have a spare on-hand.
- ◆ Hand sanitizer: Always have some with you.
- ◆ Antibacterial wipes: There will almost always be something worth

running a wipe over.

- ◆ Something to write with: Bring your own ink pen for signing any paperwork given to you. Actually, bring two. Just in case.
- ◆ Beverages: Water, soda, juice—canned, bottled or boxed. Always have something that is readily available to you. That goes for snacks and food, as well; catering on sets will not be like what it was pre-COVID.

I hope this doesn't sound like I'm asking you to plan for a day on a set in the same way you would pack for a camping trip. That is not at all my intention. But a need to be hypervigilant is important for all of us.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

It's anyone's guess, really. But once we arrive at what will become the new normal for everybody, no matter where we live, what we do, where we go to school, where we work or where our career journeys are destined to take us, we will get there. Let's take small steps now on the road to greater leaps later. Let's remember that we are all in this together. Let's remember that there will be a next chapter for all of us. Plan for it. Strategize about it. Take those small steps now to enable your journey to get up to speed soon and get you back on track for the career you have to have.

Indeed it is new landscape yet again. Challenge should inspire us—and while none of us saw COVID coming, nor were we prepped for its arrival or its impact, with planning, preparation and perspective, we can thrive in this new normal.

The first order of business is to take care of yourself and those around you. Stay safe and healthy. Any opportunity initially perceived as “valuable” isn't an opportunity you should pursue if it comes with any risk.

These are challenging times for most and difficult times for many. But calmer times will soon prevail. Write about your experiences. Make notes of your observations. Indeed, you will have stories to tell—and we will want to hear them.

INDUSTRY-RELATED COVID RESOURCES:

This is by no means a listing of every resource and/or website available. Rather, this is a short-list to get you started, should you need assistance or want to seek out additional information.

SAG-AFTRA COVID-19 Updates & Resources <https://www.sagaftra.org/>

“The Safe Way Forward”

Joint Report from the DGA, SAG-AFTRA, IATSE and Teamsters on COVID-19 Safety Guidelines to Provide Safe Workplaces in a Pre-Vaccine World

<https://www.sagaftra.org/‘-safe-way-forward’-joint-report-dga-sag-aftra-iatse-and-teamsters-covid-19-safety-guidelines>

Actors Equity Association Releases COVID-19 Safety Resources for Producers

<https://www.actorsequity.org/news/PR/ProducerResources/>

The Actors Fund COVID-19 Resource List

<https://actorsfund.org/services-and-programs/covid-19-resource-list>

Backstage: COVID-19 Resources for Actors, Creators & Performing Artists

<https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/oronavirus-covid19-actor-performing-arts-news-resources-70497/>

The Los Angeles Times: Where Entertainment Industry Workers Can Go for Help During the Coronavirus Crisis <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2020-03-24/entertainment-industry-offers-string-of-funds-for-help>

Variety: All the Ways Hollywood Workers Can Get Financial Help <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/hollywood-workers-financial-help-funds-coronavirus-1203540681/>

The Hollywood Reporter: How to Help Entertainment Professionals Affected by the Coronavirus <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/entertainment-professionals-affected-by-coronavirus-how-help-guide-1285665/item/actors-fund-1285670>

SAG Indie: COVID-19 Resources for Filmmakers & Actors <https://www.sagindie.org/filmmaker-resources/covid-19/>

SAG-AFTRA Foundation: COVID-19 Relief Fund <https://sagaftra.foundation/assistance/disasterrelief/>

Art New York (Alliance of Resident Theatres):

Resources for Responding to COVID-19 in New York City <https://>

www.art-newyork.org/coronavirus-resources#resources

New York Theatre Workshop: Resources for Artists [https://
www.nytw.org/resources-for-artists/](https://www.nytw.org/resources-for-artists/)

Also:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

World Health Organization (WHO)
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

National Institutes of Health (NIH)
<https://www.nih.gov/coronavirus>

Lastly: New episodes of our YouTube series, “Inside the Business of Acting,” feature conversations with industry leaders about their perspectives on the impact of COVID on the industry and how to navigate through it.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq01PH_JpE4fSXS9tnC2MSA

For specific COVID-related news and information for the country, state, territory, county, municipality, city, town or community in which you live, Google your location and the word “COVID” to generate a list of available resource links for your area.



Keep safe, stay positive . . .

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Summer 2020

APPENDIX: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRAD LEMACK is a talent manager, educator, content creator and author.

He opened Los Angeles-based Lemack & Company Talent Management/Public Relations in 1982, following his stint as a publicity executive at pioneer producer Norman Lear's TV production company, housed on the lot at Universal Studios, in Hollywood. Previously, Lemack had been an innovative television and radio producer and broadcaster for many years in Boston.

Creating the opportunity to do the kind of work he has a passion for, with the opportunity to develop, redevelop, and brand established and emerging talent, Lemack & Company has since established itself in many areas of talent management and public relations, including entertainment, personality and book publicity, business, corporate and non-profit, special event creation, production and promotion, and career/brand development, marketing and career coaching for actors.

In addition to Brad's leadership at Lemack & Company, he has also been a member of the faculty at Boston's Emerson College Los Angeles Campus since 1995, where he created and teaches courses in the business of acting and entertainment public relations.

In 2010, Brad added to his academic responsibilities when he joined the faculty of North Carolina's Elon University Los Angeles Program, where he created and teaches a course in entertainment PR and supervises the University's Los Angeles internship's academic program.

Brad received his Bachelor of Science degree in communications from Emerson College and his Master of Arts in theatre arts and dance, with a concentration in performance for social change, from California State University, Los Angeles.

He is also the host of the YouTube series *Inside the Business of Acting*, based on the business concepts introduced and taught in both his college

courses and his popular books for actors.

His first book, *The Business of Acting: Learn the Skills You Need to Build the Career You Want*, was first published in 2002. His second book, *The New Business of Acting: How to Build a Career in a Changing Landscape*, was first published in 2010. *The New Business of Acting: The Next Edition* is his third book.

Brad is also a popular seminar speaker and workshop leader, and a contributing columnist for *Backstage*.

Additional biographical information is available at LemackCo.com, TheBusinessOfActing.com and on Brad's IMDb.com and IMDbPro.com pages.



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